

plough the demesne as his service due, was generally expected to work with his own team of cattle and horses. These animals were often good enough for his own little patch, but did not meet the bailiff's requirements. Ploughing, besides, required more skill and energy than most other agricultural operations. Unwilling workmen, working neither for love nor money, with their light ploughs and scanty teams of weak-kneed oxen, required the constant superintendence of the bailiff, lest they should drive the furrow crooked or rest at every turn. They became a bad financial speculation for the landlord. Between 1300 and 1348 the movement, already begun in the previous century, went on apace, and the services of ploughing on the demesne were constantly commuted for money-rent paid in quittance to the lord.<sup>1</sup> More slowly, but always steadily, the less skilled services of reaping, ditching and threshing were similarly commuted for cash-payments.<sup>2</sup> With this money the bailiff hired labourers to plough and till the demesne. These workmen were of two classes. First, the villein whose forced services had been wholly or partially commuted, but who still remained a serf, unfree and bound to the soil of the manor by the law of the land; secondly, the free labourer whose legal position, as regards personal liberty, corresponded to the farm servant of to-day. This class had greatly increased since the Conquest. Many villeins had worked their little holdings to such advantage that they had been able to purchase their freedom, while others had fled from servitude to outlawry in the wastes and woods that then divided district from district, whence in a new part of England they had emerged into a new career as free men.<sup>3</sup>

On a society thus slowly changing its character from one of feudal relation to one of free contract, fell, in the middle of Edward the Third's reign, the gigantic calamity of the Black Death. The number of those who perished in the unimaginable horrors of that year has been sometimes estimated at a third, sometimes at a half, of the whole population. Precise calculations are impossible, but it is clear that when in the

<sup>1</sup> See Ap.  
Manor.

<sup>2</sup> Ashley, i. 1, 29 ; T. W. Page, 24-8 ; Cambridge

\* Ashley, i. 1, chap. i.; T. W. Page, 16-8.